

FUTURE IN OUR HANDS THE GAMBA

NEWSLETTER

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FIOHTG HOSTS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN DELIVER CONFERENCE



FIOHTG has hosted the ‘Women Deliver Conference’ which attracted over 100 women participants from the civil society, private sector and government of the Gambia and from the subregion. The event jointly organized and funded by Center for International Private Enterprise, World Movement for Democracy and the National Endowment for Democracy and hosted as well as coordinated in the Gambia by FIOHTG was meant to bring civil society, government and private sectors representatives together to draw and share lessons learnt from the Gambia and elsewhere for the attainment of the National Development Plan of the Gambia in addressing the needs of women, ensuring that the civil society plays the required role as a middle ground between citizens and government and to allow the private sector to lead responsible and inclusive growth.

MADAM FORSTER REFLECTS ON THE SITUATION OF WOMEN



Madam Hannah Forster, Director of the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies was one of the guest speakers at the Women Deliver Forum, here is an excerpt from her statement.

In the Gambia while women comprise 56% of the electoral body, are seriously underrepresented in elected and appointed bodies with a female presence of only 7% in the National Assembly, they form less than 23% in local councils and about 17% at the level of the central executive. Gender equality rights present a challenge from multiple perspectives ranging from deficits in political party participation representations to a culture of marginalization of women and violations of their fundamental human rights.

Moreover, women are discouraged to voice their problems and concerns and are exposed to the constant pressures of the patriarchal society. We must however note the importance of women’s participation and accept that they must lead in the change in making democracy deliver. Women need to recognize the important role they play in these processes and be provided all the opportunities possible for the benefit of the communities as well as the nation. They need to be encouraged to get out of their comfort zones and reach across the different sectors to find mutual interest in advancing inclusive democratic policies and reforms that benefit us and our communities.

And that leads me to the situation in leadership; that worldwide when we look at parliamentarians, we are looking at 24% of women that are parliamentarians worldwide, and when you compare the 7% that Gambia is at, we need to pull ourselves up. As advocates of gender equality in Africa, we cannot operate in descriptions and approximations; gaps of gender inequality must be recorded so that a trail of implementation is clear and decision makers are held to account. According to a study by Plan International, many women and girls between 15 and 24 want to take up leadership at various levels whether it is in the workplace, politics and wider society, yet 9 out of 10 believe that women leaders will suffer widespread discriminations and sexual harassment no matter where you come from and your ability to contribute to change. In that study 76%, a very high percentage, aspired to be leaders. We also saw that in that study 60% were confident of their abilities to lead, yet 94% believed that being a woman leader involved being unfairly treated compared to men. They also believed that 93% of female leaders experienced unwanted physical contact. These are some of the challenges that we will have to address as we move towards women delivering.

Continued on the next page.



We want to see government effort complemented in this area. So some recommendations I want to share include policy changes. Yes, policy changes are taking place but at a slow rate. We need to do more. These changes are requisite for implementation of these reforms. However, we need to also consider building of capacity of private sector and civil society to enable them make informed choices and put input into policy making especially the women in those areas in the private sector as well as in civil society. We also want to see the improvement of growth and economic development through the enhancement of networking and building strategic partnerships. You will hear me repeating strategic partnerships, talking about private and public partnerships and creating a dialogue mechanism is very crucial. Many times challenges occur not because we do not have the solutions but because we are not talking about it, there is no dialogue and we are not even listening to each other.

So I believe these are things we will have to put on the table and put on our agenda as well. We need to reinforce that partnership between government and civil society as you all know there is a climate of mistrust that we need to mend if we want to ensure that national development is achieved. Capacity strengthening at all levels and across all sectors is also key. To conclude, I want to say that in spite of all the progress made to attain women's participation and representation, a lot more needs to be done. It is our collective responsibility that we endeavor to:

- Change the narrative. We need to change the narrative. Women are moving from vulnerability to being agents of change and drivers of progress. Investment in women and girls impact positively on communities, on the nation and on development and above all the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, the Gambia We Want will eventually be making a meaningful contribution to the Africa We Want.*
- We need to mobilize across sectors engaging all sectors and generations towards these goals.*
- We need to create inspiring and results based country actions, like I said implementing democracy is not a straight-jacket but we need to ensure that we have it based on our own needs and based on our own situations.*

Madam Chairperson, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is time for us to redefine power as gender activists and recognise our ability to use power for the common good at all levels. We should embrace the facts in a gender equal world we all stand to gain. We need to strengthen our investments and consolidate our gains; that is our political gains, our economic gains and social gains; call it what you may. And we need to break down structural power and all barriers to progress and attainment of gender equality.

Lastly, the power of movement needs to be embraced because in many times you find out that we are working in silos and building empires. It is not helping we need to be able to engage all sectors, across sectors, across generation and the need to also ensure that we use the opportunities to advance gender equality causes. I would like to commend the organisers of this initiative, the World Movement and the CIPE and Future In Our Hands; and to also reiterate, the African Center's commitment to accompany this process once we agree on the way to go forward.

I just wanted to share some outcomes of a study we did in the area of women's political participation. We carried out a study on political party manifestoes and constitutions as well as looking at the 1997 Constitution. What we found out is that on paper, everything looks very beautiful but when it came to implementation, it is a different study. So, ensuring that there is accountability, ensuring that there is implementation is not the work of only civil society, all our hands must be on deck, if we want women to deliver.

Editor's Note: This excerpt is drawn from Madam Forster's Speech delivered at the Women Conference in Banjul on 2nd March 2020 at the Kairaba Beach Hotel. Madam Forster is a seasoned educationists, human rights and gender activists with decades of experience in government and civil society.



MAYORESS LOWE DECRIES WOMEN UNDER-REPRESENTATION



Another speaker at the Women Deliver Conference was the Mayoress of Banjul, Rohey Malick Lowe. Here is an excerpt:

“Ladies and gentlemen, indeed there are a lot of challenges facing us women leaders. But with the advent of the national development plan we hope that the opportunities presented in the document if implemented will serve as a base to leverage on.... And I want to sincerely thank the women of the Gambia once again in this important forum. When I say, sometimes people ask me why do you have to thank them. The answer is simple. Because they fought tooth and nail to

change the cultural norms and traditional barriers by electing me as the first female mayor.

...on challenges...in the context of local government [sic]. The policy level representation is very minimal, at policy level discussions and at the decision making level where it matters most especially for women. Basically...where policies are made, women are mostly not included or few of them will come to represent...1 million women in the Gambia. And that is to say, in my municipality of course, there is only female deputy CEO, one female technician and 3 councilors and if you ask me, how many of us are there? I can tell you more than at least 300 workers in the council. So in the hierarchy, we have less than 5 women. Sometimes, I ask myself a question. Will this change? Will the National Development Plan bring a change to women empowerment or not. The answer, I will leave it to you.

...in respect to participation, the fact is the majority of vulnerable women neither participates in forums nor adequately informed or sensitized. I think we will all agree that when it comes to sensitization for women empowerment, I think central government has a very limited budget. I have to give credit to other stakeholders like the UNDP...

...on capacity building and training: At the level of local governance, women empowerment through training and capacity building is nonexistent and council has to struggle to fund or lobby for such capacity building and training. If not sustainability and continuity of intervention will be lacking as the main users are not prepared for such roles. So again when we talk about capacity building and training, I heard one of the speakers here saying she disagreed with one of the speakers who said there is not enough capacity building for women. And I totally agreed with the person who said that it is true there is not enough capacity building for women at all. And this is affecting the leadership of women in this country.

...about resource allocation,

It is still a problem for women involved in policy decisions at local governance level, there should be a clear-cut policy to enable my municipality to access funds from central government as stated in the Local government act....”

Editor’s Note: Rohey Malick Lowe is the first elected female mayor of the Gambia.



GAMBIAN WOMEN COMPETENT FOR NDP'S REALISATION SAYS DIRECTOR FABURAY



The Country Director of Future In Our Hands The Gambia has said that Gambian women are more than competent enough to steer the affairs of the country for the realization of the objectives stated in the National Development Plan.

Mr. Faburay said “I have the belief and conviction that all what we need is to create the space and the conducive environment for the women to take up leadership roles. We have a lot of competent women in this country who can bring a change for the better to our national development agenda”. Mr. Faburay made the remarks in delivering a closing statement at the Women Deliver Forum on 2nd March 2020 at the Kairaba Beach Hotel.

Above photo: Faburay sits in the middle

Mr. Faburay used the opportunity to thank the invitees to the event. He also thanked “the World Movement for Democracy, CIPE and NED for having the trust and confidence in...FIOHTG to fund this very important and timely conference”. He also thanked “the organising committee at FIOHTG led by Madam Jainaba Sarr for their commitment during the planning”. He also commended “Dani and team at NED in Washington DC for their patience, technical and moral support”. Mr. Faburay ended by thanking all the participants for sharing their experience and called on “women to actively participate and take up their rightful positions in national development” while praying for a safe journey for the invitees.



M&E OFFICE SAYS OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE ARE MET

The M&E Office of FIOHTG has shared results of its evaluation of the International Women's Conference. According to the release, all objectives of the Conference were attained as over 70% of participants in most cases strongly agreed that the objectives have been attained. Here is an excerpt:

“More than 2/3 of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Forums/Panels led to the establishment of mutual interests for partnership by actors in public, private and civil society sectors. In fact, an additional 7% partially agreed that the forum led to establishment of mutual interests for partnership finance, investment and gender mainstreaming, while a little over 1/10th of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed... 85% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Conference helped them to hear and understand diverse perspectives; 11% partially agreed with the statement and 4% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement...97% of respondents strong agreed, agreed or partially agreed that they will now collaborate with representatives from the other sectors, thanks to the conference. Only 3% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed”. In addition, one of the core aims of the conference was to bring women together to identify the relevant practical steps for the realization of a National Development Plan that is friendly to women. In reacting to the statement, 56% of respondents stated that practical steps for the implementation of women friendly NDP were identified during the conference and 29% of respondents partially agreed that the practical steps were identified. However, 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the practical steps for the implementation of the NDP were identified during the Conference”.

In light of the above, the M&E Office has thumbed up the Conference saying that those interested in promoting women empowerment should consider adopting the conference style to shape their thinking in bring women together.



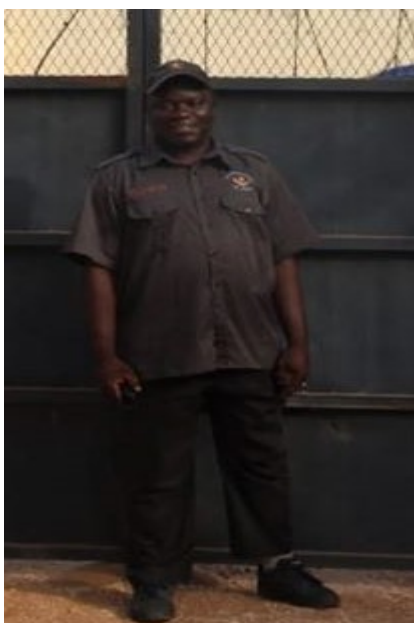
DOZENS TRAINED ON FOOD PROCESSING & PRESERVATION IN NBR



FIOHTG is well aware of the role of food and food products in poverty and development. That is why we have incorporated food preservation and processing as a strategy to alleviate poverty and enhance the economic well being of our communities. We know that a lot of food is wasted and food products are often underpriced in their raw form. To address this, we have been training communities on simple techniques to preserve and process their food products. Alimatou Marong of the Community Development Unit spent 5 days in Kerr Sidiki in North Bank Region in March to train about 40 community comprising women, men and youth. Meanwhile Rose T. Mendy of the said unit was in Kerr Katim Fula to train 40 participants. It is envisaged that the training will prevent postharvest lost, improve health status, increase income levels, create linkages and employment opportunities especially for youths. Various locally available products like pepper, cassava, watermelon, banana, groundnut, pawpaw, wonjo and tomato were processed and preserved into jam, gari, tomato paste, pepper sauce and juices.



FIOHTG REGRETS TO ANNOUNCE THE DEATH OF ABDOULIE DAFFEH, A DEDICATED STAFF OF THE ORGANISATION



The entire staff of FIOHTG, Management, Board members and FIOH Sweden, regret to announce the demise of a colleague Abdoulie Daffeh who has served the organisation for many years as one of its security. This sad news happened on the 19th March, 2020 at the MRC in Fajara. He was humble, dedicated, committed and obedient to his work. This sad news is extended to all partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries of FIOHTG and FIOH Sweden. He was laid to rest at his home town in Jambanjali on the same day. May his soul rest in eternal peace.



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Do you have a story or an event for the next newsletter?

If so, we would like to hear from YOU!

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